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STATE FOR EAP/ANP; EAP/RSP AND S/CT

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TAGS: PREL MARR ASEAN NZ

SUBJECT: GNZ SHARES SIMILAR VIEWS ON ARF; PROSPECTS FOR
REAL CHANGE REMAIN UNCERTAIN

REF: STATE 8005

Classified By: Pol/Econ Counselor Margaret B. McKean; Reason 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) On February 7, Pol/Econ Counselor delivered reftel demarche material to Tim McIvor, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (MFAT) head of the Asia Regional Unit that deals with ARF and ASEAN affairs. McIvor indicated that the GNZ had already supplied comments to the USG's ARF proposal to EAP/RSP. McIvor underscored that New Zealand shares USG views on needed changes to the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF). ARF, he said, needs to look afresh at its role and priorities. He agreed that the organization needs to transition from a forum ("talk shop") to an activities-based organization that addresses issues of regional concern in cooperative fashion. McIvor offered that Singapore should look at ARF more fundamentally than perhaps the GOS would like to. Nevertheless, he sees Indonesia, Singapore, and Thailand as the likeliest countries within ASEAN to promote real reform.

¶2. (C) McIvor agreed that the Friends of the ARF Chair has been a helpful mechanism; he also agreed with the USG proposal to split the ARF chair from the ASEAN chair, but argued strongly that the USG should clarify that the ARF chair would remain with another ASEAN nation -- otherwise, ASEAN will reject the concept to protect the primacy of ASEAN within ARF. McIvor added that the notion that ASEAN has primacy within ARF is "a fiction," noting that ASEAN's partners continue to drive the organization. ARF should have a vision statement, which will hopefully lead Singapore to review more closely how ARF can add value in a region that has a larger number of organizations with overlapping agendas. He agreed that ARF should move past dialogue towards more practical activities, and urged that the activities be selected carefully to ensure maximum participation. McIvor said that the ever-expanding number of ARF meetings has made it difficult for some countries to send representatives; even New Zealand is finding it challenging, he added.

¶3. (C) On the USG-proposed Counter Terrorism and Transnational Crime (CTTC) workplan, McIvor said he would have to confer with MFAT colleagues who deal with counterterrorism (CT) issues -- most of whom are out of the country at the moment. In principle, CT issues should be exactly what the ARF should be focused on, noted McIvor, who said he would study the proposed workplan.

¶4. (C) Finally, concerning the ASEAN Defense Ministers Meeting Plus, McIvor said that New Zealand is waiting for a revised paper from Singapore and is consulting closely with

the GOS on the issue. MFAT has instructed its diplomatic missions in ASEAN countries to stay in touch with their Singaporean counterparts on reactions by host country governments. Singapore has recommended that the Plus mechanism include EAS members plus the United States, offered McIvor.

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